



Southeast Utah



Health Department



## NEWS RELEASE

**Date: August 25, 2015**

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### **Tularemia Infects Mesa County Colorado Woman**

#### **Residents and visitors urged to take precautions**

Tularemia has been confirmed in a second Mesa County, Colorado woman. She was likely exposed through a bite from a deer fly or tick while on public lands in the Ruby-Horsethief section of the Colorado River in Mesa County, Colorado. Two other travelers from out of the area, one adult and one child, were also diagnosed with the infection after spending time along the Colorado River around the same time period that the Mesa County residents were infected.

While there have yet to be any confirmed cases of Tularemia in Grand County, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Southeast Utah Health Department urge residents to take precautions while in areas where wildlife is active. Beth Ransel, BLM Moab Field Manager said that “The BLM strongly encourages all visitors to areas where wildlife is active to take precautions to avoid exposure to tularemia and for those that believe they may have been exposed to seek timely medical attention.”

Tularemia is not common in Utah but through June of this year there had been 2 cases. However, the State of Colorado has seen elevated numbers of human cases of tularemia so far this year. Sixteen cases were confirmed statewide in 2014, compared with 27 cases recorded to date this year, as of Friday, Aug. 14.

#### **Take these precautions to avoid being exposed to tularemia:**

- Do not handle or feed wild animals.
- Do not approach or pick up sick or dead animals.
- Use insect repellent with DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus.
- Wear long pants, long sleeves, and long socks to keep tick and deer flies off your skin.
- Avoid grassy and brushy areas when recreating outdoors when hiking, picnicking, or during any activity that can disturb soil, causing tularemia bacteria to become airborne.
- If you need to dispose of an animal carcass on your property, wear gloves and use a long-handled shovel to place it in a garbage bag, and then place the bag in an outdoor garbage can.
- Do not handle or drink untreated water.
- Be careful when handling hunter harvested game. Wear gloves when skinning rabbits and rodents.
- Cook all meat properly at a minimum of 165° F inner temperature.
- Clean and disinfect all knives and equipment used to process wild game.

- Protect your pets. Prevent them from hunting or eating wild animals. Treat pets regularly for ectoparasites, including ticks. Contact a veterinarian if your pet becomes ill with a high fever and/or swollen lymph nodes.
- Do not feed raw game meat or inner organs to pets.
- Report any increased mortalities of rabbits and rodents to the local Utah Division of Wildlife office immediately.

Tularemia is caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis*. The disease mainly affects rabbits, beavers, muskrats, and other wild rodents. Humans and pets can become exposed by direct contact with an infected animal (e.g. during skinning of infected game), by ingesting contaminated food or water, or being bitten by infected insects (especially ticks and deer flies). Clinical signs in humans and animals can occur 1-10 days after exposure, and symptoms can include fever, depression, and weakness, swelling of lymph nodes, and occasionally vomiting and diarrhea. A skin ulcer may develop at the site of infection.

Tularemia is treatable. Contact your health care provider if you notice symptoms including sudden fever, chills, headaches, diarrhea, muscle aches, joint pain, swollen glands, dry cough, progressive weakness, an infected ulcer-like bite and difficulty breathing.

For more information, call SUHD Brady Bradford at (435) 637-8729 or email [bbradfor@utah.gov](mailto:bbradfor@utah.gov), call BLM Beth Ransel, BLM Moab Field Manager at (435) 259-2100 or email [bransel@blm.gov](mailto:bransel@blm.gov), call UDWR Annette Roug at (801)5384758 or email [aroug@utah.gov](mailto:aroug@utah.gov), or call UDWR Chris Wood (435) 613-3701.